

Washington, DC – The United States House of Representatives today is expected to vote on an amendment authored by Congresswoman Gwen Moore, D-Wisc., to increase funding for legal assistance to victims of domestic violence. The amendment adds \$4 million to the Civil Legal Assistance Program, which provides legal representation for domestic violence victims so they are able to obtain restraining orders, win custody of their children, and navigate the complex and expensive criminal justice system. The amendment will be included in the fiscal year 2010 Commerce, Science, Justice Appropriations Act.

“Nearly 70 percent of women who take their abusers to court do so without any legal representation, greatly jeopardizing their chances of getting the protection they desperately need and deserve,” Rep. Moore said. “Without representation, these women and their children remain vulnerable to continued abuse. They risk being turned down for a restraining order and losing custody of their children.”

Moore introduced this amendment because there are currently serious challenges impeding the ability of domestic violence programs to connect victims in need with attorneys. Limited funding for these programs leads to reductions in staff and the discontinuation of specialized services.

“A financial barrier to the criminal and civil justice system should not deny women access to protection. It is critical that we increase funding for the legal assistance program, which will embolden women to raise their voices against domestic abuse through the justice system,” Moore said.

“We commend Congresswoman Moore and Congressman Poe for their bipartisan leadership on this critically important issue,” said Sue Else, president of the National Network to End Domestic Violence. “Legal assistance for victims is one of the most effective ways to stop domestic violence. It is the only federal tool designed to meet the wide-ranging legal needs of domestic violence survivors. This program represents a top priority for domestic violence advocates, and we urge members of Congress to follow Gwen Moore and Ted Poe’s lead and support this life-saving legislation.”

“Without access to adequate or any legal representation, domestic violence victims frequently risk losing custody of their children to their abusers who are more likely to have an attorney,” said Patti Seger, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence. “As a result, victims sometimes choose to stay with their abusers for fear of what might happen to their children if they are not there to protect them. No victim should be faced with a choice to remain in violence because the very systems that were established to protect them are often likely to award custody of their children to an abuse perpetrator.”

The Civil Legal Assistance Program has been cited as one of the most effective means of reducing domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence often require legal assistance to get restraining orders against their abusers, but many lack the financial resources to acquire the necessary representation. The program ensures that victims have the means to go to court with experienced attorneys who clearly understand the rights of domestic violence victims and the

processes surrounding their cases.

Each year, there are more than 25,000 incidents of domestic violence reported to Wisconsin law enforcement agencies, and more than 40,000 women, children and men are served in Wisconsin domestic abuse programs. In 2007 and 2008, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse found that domestic violence survivors perceive legal assistance to be one of the areas of unmet needs.

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